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PRESS COMMENT

ON

“NEW BROOMS”

By ROBERT J. SHORES

THE BOBBS-MERRILL COMPANY

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PRESS COMMENT ON "NEW BROOMS"

The reason for the book's title, *New Brooms*, is rather obscure, but there is nothing obscure about the delightful contributions that fill the volume. They are as fanciful and in as chaste English as anything that ever appeared in the older *Idler* or the *Spectator*. The book is one to be carried into the den or the cozy corner and read when one is at peace with the world and full of good dinner and content. The letters can be read *ad seriatim* or can be picked out at random and with never a disappointment.

—*Cincinnati Times-Star*.

In a book entitled *New Brooms*, Robert J. Shores presents the topics of the day with a literary touch quite alien to the usual metropolitan press fashion of enlightening the public concerning transpirings covered with the terse word, "news."

Mr. Shores is remindful of the long past spirit of dignified periodicals that treated the affairs of the people logically; to this spirit Shores adds a certain breezy touch in his mode of reasoning. . . . He uses pleasing language and his ideas are attractively lucid.—*Chicago Examiner*.

Robert J. Shores, whether or no he has followed out the remaining portion of the axiom he has taken for a title and "swept clean" the subjects upon which he has dwelt in this work, has at least succeeded in producing a decidedly entertaining volume. . . . Vital or merely interesting topics are touched upon by the writer in a whimsical vein, but with understanding and sympathy, as well as originality. The volume is certain to delight those who care for something out of the beaten track.

—*Oakland Enquirer*.

The book's the thing—clearly. When Mr. Robert J. Shores was publishing his whimsical and searching essays in his own little magazine, the *Idler*, he received such scant encouragement that he recently bade the public good-by (in one of the most delicious valedictories it was ever our pleasure to read) and published the *Idler* no more.

Now, however, we have the best of the old *Idler* essays in a very attractive volume, *New Brooms* (Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis). We predict that those who put the *Idler* aside, meaning to take it up at their leisure—and never taking it up at all, in many cases—will be induced, by the more permanent form in which these essays are now published, to read them both with care and with delight. In other words, they are now offered in a form proportioned to their real value.

There are, comparatively, only a few literary workmen who possess the ability to employ sophistry skilfully in the pointing out of truth. Mr. Shaw has that talent. Mr. Shores has it. On its face, the logic of Seth Shirtless is absurd; yet to those who read

between the lines, there is a kind of delicious wisdom in this essay. The same quality is found in "A Puritan in Bohemia"—though in this chapter there is found an amazingly good short story, in connection with an essay. Mr. Shores doubtless is acquainted with the rule-o'-thumb phrases pertaining to "a squinting construction." Let us say, then, that he has made the most, not of a squinting construction, but of a squinting significance. He looks both ways in an extraordinarily happy manner—toward that which is frolicsome, and toward that which is serious.

It is not easy to put one of these essays above another in point of merit. "A Philosophical Cook," "On Pensioning Writers," and all the rest, are quite charming. And there is distinction even in some of the titles—as, for examples, "Is Chesterton a Man Alive?" and an "Arraignment of Originality."

We are glad that Mr. Shores has found his way into a book. We shall hope to find him so located again and again.

—*St. Louis Times.*

It is a collection of most delightful essays, each addressed to the editor of *The Idler*, an imaginary publication which serves as a capital receiving end for the author's delivery. The essays cover a very wide range of topics, and the manner of treatment is as various as the subjects discussed. Few finer examples of satire have found print in America than that wail at the disappearance of beggars, that disquisition upon economy by the Ashman, commonly called a scavenger. There is a world of philosophy, capitally presented by a pretended cook; and from the latter I want to take a brief passage for your showing. . . . There are twenty-nine topics, not one depending on the matter selected, but all most readable because of the manner employed. It isn't a book to draw tears, nor break a lance for some Great Cause. But it is a delightful thing to sit down with of an evening, and put oneself in tune by the very music of its composition, by the lightness of the thought, and the delicate shading of its words.

I don't know whether any bookseller here in Salt Lake handles *New Brooms*; but any of them will get a copy for you. And you will thank me, as you read it, for calling it to your attention. I believe Bobbs-Merrill have presented the best American essayist in Mr. Shores.—*Goodwin's Weekly*, Salt Lake City.

New Brooms, by Robert J. Shores, is a book for the essay lover. A whimsical turn of mind distinguishes this collection of papers on many subjects. They are written in the form of letters, letters supposed to be addressed to the editor of the *Idler*, and they come from sources as different as an old maid living in the country, a cook who philosophizes upon his art, and a gentleman defending beggars. Few of the problems, worries, amusements and ideas that stir our modern world but get their comment, a comment light but wise, mingling the serious with the playful in a delightful manner. Every one who enjoys sane and incisive opinions on life in its countless phases, expressed with originality and distinction, will be sure to give this book a hearty welcome.

—*The Bookseller*, New York.

Any one who has ever wanted to write a letter to the papers about it—but hasn't done so—will be interested in a book by Robert J. Shores called *New Brooms*. Some of the most interesting parts of the *Spectator* are the purported letters from contributors. Mr. Shores has taken these letters for his model, and one must read his book to realize how cleverly he has imitated the style of Addison and Steele, and what an admirable vehicle he has found for expressing his opinion about a number of things, from the men's fashion notes in the theatrical programme to socialism, bohemianism, smoking, fat actors, and mad poets. The names of the correspondents are not the least clever part of the letters. For example, Anna Pest writes about a new poetical form she has invented, and P. Rose complains of poet's license. There are twenty-nine of the letters, all expressing varied individualities, and together form an interesting and amusing social commentary. In short, Mr. Shores' *New Brooms* is an up-to-date vacuum cleaner, warranted to clear up a good many cobwebby notions and reveal truth and humor underneath.

—*New York Globe*.

The *New Brooms*, wielded by Robert J. Shores, sweep clean, as new brooms are supposed to do and should do. They sweep away some of the cobwebs that clutter men's mind. The *New Brooms* are light essays on light topics. The commonplace affairs of commonplace folks are treated in a style that is not at all commonplace.

The essays take the form of communications from sundry persons to *The Idler*, the odd little magazine formerly published by Shores, in which these persons are permitted to unburden themselves of whimsical observations on life as life manifests itself in their surroundings.

While the treatment is light, and delightful in its lightness, there is not altogether lacking a minor strata of serious wisdom which is the more acceptable because the less looked for. The essays, twenty-nine in number, are the culling of Shores' writings in *The Idler*.

It is not the sort of book that will be read from cover to cover before another is taken up. It is not designed so to be read. But, given a handy place on the library table, it will beguile many a desultory half hour, and disclose delights on second reading that may be missed on the first.—*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

This volume contains a score or more of amusing essays, mostly whimsical in tone, concerning matters of every-day life. They are supposed to be letters written to a magazine by various writers. Some are quite trifling, but are so well written they entertain; many have a bit of sound sense hidden under their fun. In fact, they might be taken seriously if one wished; in which respect they fulfill the conditions of perfect satire.

—*Brooklyn Standard-Union*.

It is with an increasing sense of a mistake somewhere that you come across references to New York City or anything else

American in *New Brooms*. You are quite certain for a minute or two that some printer has merely substituted the words for London or whatever English equivalent the sense demands. But the publishers are American and so, we have been assured, is the writer.

The essays, though, are very un-American. The leisurely style, the Addison-Steele-Lamb-Chesterton touches, the not being afraid to treat seriously comparatively trivial phases of things—they are all very English—and very delightful. Which is not intended as praise of the English to the disparagement of our own essayists.

The essays are in the form of letters, from various kinds of people to the editor of *The Idler*, and they touch upon a motley of topics . . . each one with a keen understanding of human nature and its follies which is none the less keen because it is gentle.

Most of the essays are satires, but a few are straight seriousness—and truly beautiful they are too.—*Cleveland Leader*.

Robert J. Shores has employed very unusual and unique methods in discussing the many topics of timely interest in his new book, *New Brooms*, recently published by the Bobbs-Merrill Company of Indianapolis. Many of the light and serious problems of the present day are handled with airy wit and delightful humor. Mr. Shores has a very keen insight and a large degree of homely philosophy and common sense. His analysis is worthy of serious thought by all.—*The Editor and Publisher*, New York.

New Brooms, by Robert J. Shores, is one of the recent books from the Bobbs-Merrill Company which is sure to find a hearty welcome from those who read with some discrimination. The author discusses in a style sometimes serious and again playful the problems and situations, the little things generally which go to make up life. Mr. Shores has not been afraid to draw on the language of Addison and Steele, and the result is surprisingly good.—*Buffalo Commercial*.

Mr. Shores attempts something new in modern essay writing, more especially in his choice of subjects and increases the stock of desultory reading quite neatly.—*St. Louis Globe Democrat*.

If Addison and Steele were writing to-day and, instead of the morning paper, with accounts about murder, graft and divorce, the *Spectator* came each day to our breakfast tables, can you imagine what a joy it would be for all who love good literature to see the affairs of the hour treated with gentle fancy and airy wit? That is just the kind of pleasure which awaits the reader of this book.—*Baltimore American*.

Mr. Shores' volume is interesting, for one thing, because it is the first venture in a manner new to this age. It is a good deal of a venture, too, because it is at variance with our usual literary temper and something of a challenge to our habits of literary expression. The author has gone back to Addison and Steele for his models, and treats the matters of our present-day life in the leisurely manner, the genial temper, and the careful style that

were demanded in the days of Queene Anne. If he wants to say some certain thing, he does not send it forth from the point of his pen like a brickbat from a catapult. He toys with it, ambles and prances all around it, takes little excursions away from it in various directions, circles closer and closer around it, and finally, never once having taken his eyes off it, picks it up deftly and in a neat and graceful sentence flings it straight at his mark. The essays are in the form of letters written by people of both sexes and all manner of occupations and conditions to the editor of a magazine. The method of presentation suffers in verisimilitude by the fact that in style, manner of thought, and habit of expression they are all evidently from the same pen. But they are gracefully written and are so full of neatly worked out whimsicalities, epigrams and pungent truths that the book makes very pleasant entertainment for an occasional half-hour. Like his models of the age of Anne, he likes to concern himself with matters of trivial importance, to talk about them in such a way as to make them seem affairs of moment and to make the reader see them as typical and illuminating phases of contemporary life.—*New York Times*.

In this new book the author has set forth an imaginary series of letters, purporting to be written to the editor of the *Idler*, in much the same style as those of the *Spectator*, each containing discussions of real and pertinent interest. . . . The book takes one back to the style and philosophy of the classic writers, and the English is a delight to read in this day of careless phrasing. It will be severely criticized by some as the work of an idealist setting forth conditions of amelioration that are impossible in this day and generation, and some will read it with amused observances that it forecasts the millennium. But nevertheless, I still insist it is a book to read.—*Pasadena News*.

Mr. Shores is a master of clear, unassuming English, and his viewpoint is delightfully sane, whimsical and human. The twenty-nine varied epistles supposedly written by the readers of the *Idler* magazine to its editor cover a wide range of subjects, beginning with the ideas and observations of a philosophical cook and ending with "The Fruit of Fame," "A Bachelor on Women," "A Puritan in Bohemia," "On a Certain Condescension in the Fashion Writers," "From Sarah Shelfworn," "The Literary Life," "The Poetic License" and "The Necessity for Beggars," these are a few of the piquant topics so cleverly considered. "Beds for the Bad," among other of the included papers, contains an original and refreshing idea. . . . This is not a book to keep the reader from his own bed after midnight, but it decidedly is a book to send him thither with amused chuckles, deepened sympathies and high and happy thought."—*Chicago Record-Herald*.

The *Idler*, evidently, is a modern equivalent for The *Tatler* and The *Spectator*, in the glorious days of Addison and "Dick" Steele. Unto the editor of this mythical weekly are addressed a succession of communications, each signed with a revealing and alliterative pseudonym. These letters, collected, compose *New Brooms*. Into them Robert J. Shores has injected much of the

delectable flavor of the older letters ; something of their naivete ; a similarity in range of subjects, and predominance of literary ones. They perpetually waver, each one of them, between palpable absurdity and keen satire, between originality of ideas and clever foolery. Many of the excesses of modern life are adroitly touched up. . . . The letters are written with the stately long sentences of the Addisonian era, and make amusing reading.

—*The Pittsburg Sun.*

. . . Here is a new Spectator voicing the views of an up-to-date Idler. Here is wit and philosophy and an array of contrasts between old and new, pleasantly set forth in well nigh irreproachable English.—*Detroit Free Press.*

No finer essays have appeared in a long time in this country than these. In fact, they are so close an imitation of the Addisonian style, so well turned in phrase, and so well put in logic, humor and philosophizing and descriptive matter, that one might be pardoned in saying that these essays deserve to rank as classics in English literature. They are certainly of the finest possible flavor, and the author is certain to receive high recognition from the American reading public and the American critics for his work herein.—*The Tribune, Salt Lake City.*

On the shelves of many a library, public and private, are rows of books, rarely disturbed, and on which the dust of ages has settled, with the titles *The Spectator*, *The Idler*, *The Tatler*, *The Observer* and other similar names, which are known collectively under the general classification, *The British Essayists*. In these books are most of the choicest writings of Joseph Addison, Richard Steele, Samuel Johnson and other famous literary men of London in the eighteenth century. These essays were the delight of the contemporary readers and have been cherished thesauri of scholars and men of literary tastes ever since.

That style of writing has, however, been superseded by the modern newspaper with its lurid descriptions of murder, graft and divorce, but occasionally some writer dares to put out a book in the spirit of the Spectator or the Idler, dealing with modern subjects in the modern manner. Such a book is *New Brooms*, by Robert J. Shores, just come from the press of the Bobbs-Merrill Company of Indianapolis. The author assumes the existence of a periodical called *The Idler*, to which correspondents write letters on subjects that interest them, as Addison and Steele used to do to the Spectator. While there is no such immortal creation as that of Sir Roger de Coverley, there is many a caustic criticism, a pertinent characterization, a neat hit at current folly, all written in gentle language and a charming spirit. Here are twenty-nine letters on as many subjects, some humorous, some critical, some delightfully sarcastic, treating of whimsical worries, serious moral problems, peculiar situations, new literary phases, physical handicaps, and other subjects, each one with a light and graceful touch in pure English, this last quality being itself one of the most potent charms of the book.—*Newark Sunday Call.*

It is doubtful if there is any department of a modern newspaper or periodical that for the reader of average intelligence exceeds in interest the section devoted to letters to the editor. With the title, *New Brooms*, there has just been published in book form a collection of "Letters to the Editor of the Idler," which it is entirely safe to predict will easily attain in the world of books as great a popularity as its prototype in form, if not in substance, maintains in the columns of the daily press. The book contains nearly two score of letters of marked originality from as many different readers of the Idler, discussing various topics of general interest; each is signed by an appropriate *nom de plume*; but all are from the pen of Robert J. Shores.

In a highly entertaining manner Mr. Shores has presented an array of views on men, manners and events from unexpected angles, all undreamed of in our too prevalent take it for granted outlook on life, which will hold their charm through many readings. The subject matter of these letters varies from grave to gay, and though the whimsical predominates and sparkling wit abounds, there are some that sound the deeper note of pathos, while bits of tender sentiment and quaint philosophy lend an infinite variety to the whole.

If you desire a mental tonic resulting in a beneficial stimulation of thought, such as some unused muscles of the body must enjoy when one undertakes an unusual but properly prescribed course of physical exercise, by all means read *New Brooms*.

—*The Times*, Boston, Mass.

One of the oddest books to appear in a long time. . . . The reader might well believe that Dick Steele had come to earth in some reincarnation, and any one who likes the old writings cannot fail to like this admirable imitation.—*Boston Globe*.

In *New Brooms* Robert J. Shores has continued, with a very successful imitation, both of subject and style, the somewhat antique papers, now known more by classical reputation than by reading, of the Spectator and Idler, of the days of Addison and Dick Steele.

There is a flavor of old lavender, skilfully revived, and a quaintness of conceit which belongs to a simpler and more chaste literary art than the fluent and red type most conspicuous in the contents of the magazines to-day.—*Syracuse Post-Standard*.

New Brooms by Robert J. Shores is a welcome successor of Addison's and Steele's Spectator papers, which have become shelf-worn from neglect or dogeared from overuse in high schools. In this delightful new series of essays the author's purpose, in the words of his famous predecessors is "to represent those vices which are too trivial for the chastisement of the law and too fantastical for the cognizance of the pulpit."

—*New York Evening Sun*.

The flavor of the eighteenth century is to be savored in the style of a new essayist, Robert J. Shores. Not only does he contrast restfully with the violence of modern critics of manners, but

he also inspires one to turn again to the Tatler of Steele, whom we have neglected lately as out of date. Mr. Shores proves that the fine balance of judgment, the delicate wit, the never bitter irony that marked Steele and Addison are not yet lost arts. Nor is there any incongruity in dealing with modern questions with the eighteenth century minuet-delicacy. Violence of treatment is the prevailing mode, unfortunately, not necessarily. Wit, though nowadays seldom employed, is a very telling weapon against error, and its lightness of thrust as of a rapier, is quite as destructive as the broadsword slash of the heavy reformers. The satirical treatment that the Tatler accorded dueling went far toward making that practice unpopular. Mr. Shores does well if he leads us to think through his suggestions that Sartor-psychology would help us to understand criminals; his seeming praise of *vers libre* shows the absurdity of the claims of the "new" poets. The whimsical in the Tatler and the Spectator is not superior to Mr. Shores' "Letter from a Hunchback" or his elaborated query "Is Chesterton Alive?" Mr. Shores is sure to be welcomed by those fortunate gentle readers who love graceful essays. Absurd, playfully serious, delicate in thrust, *New Brooms* might be called the *vers de societe* of essay writing.—*Los Angeles Graphic*.

Another thing more indirectly to please us was the receipt of a book by Robert J. Shores, with the new title of *New Brooms* to herald it and the imprint of Bobbs-Merrill on its title page.

Now *New Brooms* is no more than a collection of fictitious letters published formerly in The Idler, which was also a privately printed little magazine, whose author would not submit to the journalistic models of banality to get his work accepted by the publishers. He went his own way and wrote his essays, a very mellow old-world way became him best. In the clamor and push of the literary rabble he wrote for three years with all the calm and level-headedness of an Addison, with a grace and ease of style at once modern and scholarly, as was the thought which it chose to interpret, without mannerism, though with quaint conceit, without fad or mission or doxy, with genial humanity for different points of view, with wise judgment on the scramblers around him. The Idler made its place by mild persistence, until recognition came as he deserved, yes, even the recognition of the publishers, whose chief aim in these past years has been "punch," which had long before reached its apogee in that prince of punchers, Kipling, and was counterfeiting in America in O. Henry and the thousand satellites who heard about his prices. . . . France has her own perfect art of humor and gay cynicism and tenderness that has nothing of comparison here. Now we wait the new man, the New Broom. Mr. Shores must sweep steadily if he would wield it.

He has ability, he has courage, he has rare combination of maturity and youth. We wish him all success for his future.

—Hervey White in the *Wild Hawk*.

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